GOOD AND EVIL

Sheikh Mohammad M. Al-Sha'rawi

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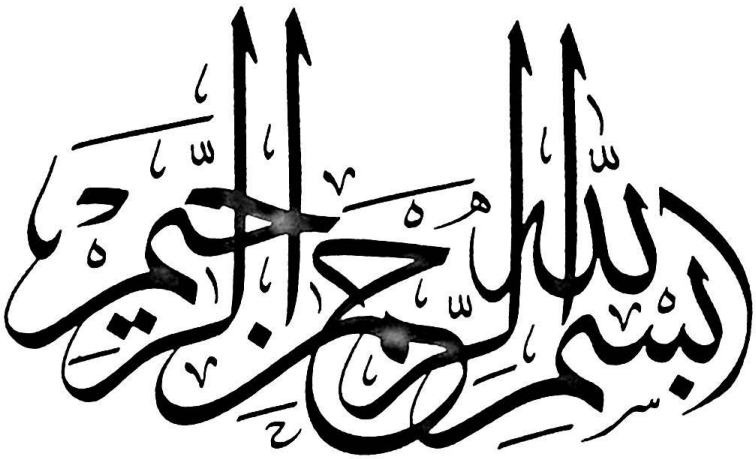

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Shaykh Muhammad Mitwalli
al-Sha'rawi

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Table of Contents

Chapter One
Goodness in Existence 1

In the Beginning was the Natural Form 3
The Meaning of Development 4
The Meaning of the Rank of Deputy 6

Chapter Two
Evil in Existence 11

The Incapacity of the Human Intellect 15
The Story of Qabil and Habil 17
There is no Hesitation in Disobedience 18
Muhammad - a Mercy to both Believer and Unbeliever 20
Good and Evil in the World Today 21

Chapter Three
The Uncertain and the Assured 25

The Real Life 26
The Causes for the Removal of Blessing 30
The Function of Wealth 32
Wealth and Influence - Blessing or Affliction? 33

Chapter Four
The Nature of Good and Evil 39

The True Meaning of Good 40
Man and the Events of Life 41
Insistence on the Blessing of Wealth 47

Chapter Five
Good and This World 51

Those who Cause Corruption in the Earth 52
Things which the Human Intellect does not Understand 55
Disabilities ... are they Evil? 58
The Beginning of Disbelief 60
The Wisdom of the Decree in Denying and Giving 61

Chapter Six
Good and Evil in the Next World 63

Belief ... a Precondition for the Acceptance of Actions 64
Evil and the Caprices of Mankind 69
The Summit of Evil in this World is Disbelief 71

Chapter One
Goodness in Existence

The subject of good and evil is one which provokes much controversy. The reason for that controversy is that people fail to understand the true meaning of life. That is because, with very few exceptions, people make their life in this world the be all and end all of everything. That is why they toil and make others toil. If anyone makes this world the sole end of their existence, Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – exhausts him in it and then he does not get anything. This world is the sole end of those who lack faith. That is because they do not believe that there is a another world. They do not believe in eternal life. They believe that all their aspirations and actions end when they leave this world. However, if they were to look with the eyes of a person of intellect, they would see that this world cannot possibly comprise the whole of human life since life in it is based on surmise and not on certainty.

People expect to live in this world until they are sixty or seventy or more. But there are those who die after only living an hour, those who die after living a day, those who die after a few weeks or months, and those who die when they are old and senile. By his nature, man thinks that he is going to remain in this world for many years but this assumption is not based on real knowledge. Death may come at any moment and no one is in fact able to predict the length of his life in this world. However, man can be certain about his life in the Next world. He knows that life there will be timeless and that there will be no death there, only the experience of either the pure delight of unending bliss or the unmitigated torment of unending punishment.

If we want to make a true judgement about anything in respect of man we have to use the yardstick of the Next World when making it. But owing to our ignorance, in the case of most of us our understanding of good and evil is based solely on the life of this world, on the fallacious assumption that rather than being simply a stage on the way to eternity, it is all that there is. The result of this is that we deem good what we consider to be enjoyment and bliss in this world and we deem evil what we consider to be misery or lack of pleasure or being deprived of what we desire. As long as this remains our understanding and we live by this false understanding, we will be wretched and far from Allah.

People judge good and evil according to their own understanding based on their own best interests rather than by looking at the whole matter in much greater depth. However, it is impossible to define good or evil by subjective criteria since they will inevitably be deficient and self-centred and will not recognise where the reality of good and evil truly lies. If we gauge an event by our own criteria, we will find that it is good for one man and bad for another. Let us suppose, for instance, that one cabinet is dismissed and a new one formed. This event is bad for those who have left the cabinet but the new ministers consider it good and are congratulated for it even though it is the same event. It is evil for some people and good for others.

How can this same event be good and evil at the same time? How can one event contain both good and evil? It must be that the criteria by which the judgement is made are faulty. That is why people do not get to the truth of the matter. If the criteria were not faulty this discrepancy and conflict of interest would not exist. When the criteria are faulty our understanding of events is bound to be faulty too. That is the reality we must look at. We will deal with the matter of good and evil in the light of this understanding.

Subjective criteria, as we have said, are simply not sufficient for judging good and evil. There must be other criteria which Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – has laid down in existence and which can be used to judge events and will give

us a true understanding of them. Our own limited understanding and inadequate knowledge are not sufficient to enable us to reach a sound conclusion on this question. Many things are hidden from us which make us not competent to judge where the reality of good and evil lie in this world. We look at things in a superficial way without deep understanding and then deliver judgements which are a long way from the truth!

If we want to measure existence according to the criteria of man's function in it – that function for which Allah Almighty created him – we must understand that Allah Almighty has set up a delicate balance for everything that happens in existence. It is according to that balance that everything should be judged. The first thing that Allah set up is the balance of goodness in existence. Goodness lies in the fact that a thing correctly fulfils the function for which it was created. That is why there are natural laws to ensure that man fulfils his function. If man violates these laws, denies them and fails to follow them his life becomes corrupt and filled with misery and evil and the goodness in it is lost. These criteria of goodness can be applied to everything that happens in existence.

In the Beginning was the Natural For m

Let us begin at the beginning of human life when a child is born. The first thing is that he is born a Muslim according to the natural form. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said:

> "Every child is born a Muslim in the natural form, and it is his parents who make him a Christian or a Jew or a Magian."

Every child comes into this world with an unspoiled natural form following the upright *deen* of Allah. Then corruption comes about through other people, namely the child's family who shift the child from the *deen* of the natural form on which Allah creat-

ed him to what they themselves believe. This is firstly evidence of the beauty of Allah at work in existence. The basis of life for any child is that Allah created everything in submission to Him. It also shows that it is only people who adulterate this goodness.

Every child comes into the world innocent, with the beauty of the natural form Allah has given him, not knowing lying, hypocrisy, theft, or any of the evils of this world. It is his parents who teach him all evil. He was created with the beauty of the natural form, truthful in word, truthful in feeling, innocent and pure. There is no such thing as a child born a liar or a thief or a hypocrite. All these evils and sins are taught him by his parents, relatives or contemporaries. It is as if creation is all beauty and all corruption in existence comes only from human intervention.

Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – wants us to develop the earth, and in order to develop it. Allah Almighty gave us intellects which enable us establish civilisations and add to them. This intellect is what distinguishes man from the animals. The animals continue to live their lives in the same way they have from the very beginning of creation. We do not, for instance, hear of a group of animals forming a society in which they study how to elevate their lives and how to develop air conditioning, for example. We do not know of any animal which has more knowledge than its parent or grandparent and knows something they did not, enabling it to develop its life and change it. That has not happened because of the self-evident fact that it does not possess the necessary aptitude.

The Meaning of Development

I am amazed at those who say that a particular animal has evolved according to the habitat it lives in so as to become like this or that so that, for instance, it has grown thick hair in cold regions or is able to change according to the colours of the plants it is on so as to conceal itself from its enemies or so that it is suddenly able to excavate a sophisticated burrow! Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – gives these different capaci-

ties to any creature He wills in order to preserve it from becoming extinct. No animal possesses any intellect or thought of its own nor any power to develop its own life. The intellect is a special quality which Allah Almighty has singled out for man alone. He has unveiled to him some of the secrets of existence which enable him to develop the earth and to advance civilisation.

Thus beauty in human life lies in humanity progressing, advancing and developing the earth. Therefore if, for instance, we enable our children to succeed without effort through fraud, special lessons, and so forth, it is as if we are destroying both knowledge and action and by doing that we corrupt the development of the earth by corrupting those whom Allah has chosen to undertake that development!

One point which people sometimes raise is the question of training animals to make certain movements which some people would have us believe rely on the intellect and understanding of the animal. This is not true because all these movements depend basically on instinct. The animal is trained either by rewarding it when it does the action by giving it food or by punishing it when it does not do it by causing it pain. When it does what it is asked to do, it does so instinctively either by the stimulus of hunger, because it knows it will get food, or from fear of the pain which will ensue if it does not do it. Therefore it is evident that the actions it performs are based on instinct and not on intelligence. If they had depended on intelligence the animal would be able to transmit what it learned to its offspring, but it cannot. There is no such thing as a lion, ape or horse which has taught its offspring the acrobatic movements which it performs in the circus arena.

Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – defined the function of Adam before he was created as can be seen in the Qur'an when He says:

> *"When your Lord said to the angels, 'I am placing a regent on the earth.'"* (2:30)

The Meaning of the Rank of Regent (Khalifa)

In giving man the honour of being His regent on the earth, Allah subjected to him all the earth's species to serve him and work on his behalf. The natural kingdoms of this world are four: mineral, vegetable, animal and human. The mineral kingdom comprises those things which we say have no sensation or movement - a view that is based on the outward appearance of things. It ends at the first stage of the vegetable kingdom which is growth. We see the coral branches in the sea possessing a primitive form of the property of growth which is the first characteristic of the plant-life of the vegetable kingdom. Plants have the properties of growth and respiration but they lack the capacities of sensation and movement which constitute the first stage of the animal kingdom. That is why we see that there is a plant which moves when you touch it, and so it is called the "Sensitive plant" (*Mimosa pudica*), and other similar plants which exist in the equatorial forests. When you touch them, their branches move. The animal kingdom begins with movement and sensation and ends at the intellect. That is why the higher species of animals have primary thought processes which enable them to learn certain movements.

As for man, he begins with the intellect and that is what distinguishes him from the rest of Allah's creatures. It is this which enables him to progress. Every generation assimilates the culture of the generation before it and adds to it in order to pass it on to the following generation. We have a vast legacy of civilisation on which to build our development.

Allah Almighty has laid the foundations of goodness in existence and without these foundations life is not correct. One of them is that life will only be as it should when man lives on the proceeds of his own work. That is why the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said:

> "No one eats any better food than a person who lives on the work of his own hands. The Prophet of Allah, Da'ud, used to eat from the work of his own hands."

Islam forbids giving a man a wage without him doing any work and because of this it is said that if there is no other work available people should dig a well and then fill it in again. From a logical point of view this makes no sense at all. Why should people dig a well and then fill it in again? The reason for it is so that people do not become accustomed to getting money without doing any work. That would result in a society of idlers who expect wages without working, thereby causing the goodness in existence to be lost and corruption to become prevalent in it. Another aspect of goodness in human existence is that Allah Almighty forbade people to consume other people's property wrongfully. The Almighty says:

> *"Do not consume one another's property wrongfully nor offer it as a bribe to judges, knowingfully attempting to consume wrongfully a portion of other people's property,"*
>
> (2:188)

When you consume my property wrongfully you deprive me of the fruit of my work. In such a case I will do nothing and I will not continue to work and be miserable. If you take the proceeds of my work, why should I work? So it is that by your consuming other people's property wrongfully, you ruin the goodness in existence, which is that each man benefits by the proceeds of his own work, and that in turn prevents action and advancement in life.

So we see that Allah - glory be to Him and may He be exalted! - has created the goodness in existence, but then man comes along and corrupts that goodness and so loses all good, and misery and evil are the inevitable result.

Allah Almighty created human society with its provision built in to it, giving each of us a gift which another does not possess. He wishes this one to be superior in architecture and that one in medicine; this one to be superior in a certain craft and that one in another. Each of us has one particular area of expertise while

others are superior to him in other respects. Allah Almighty speaks of this in the Qur'an when He says:

> *"Look how We favour some of them over others."*
> (17:21)

Allah Almighty did not, however, say who in particular is more favoured and who less favoured. The reason for this omission is that each of us is more favoured in respect of one thing and less favoured in respect of something else. One man may be a skilled architect but is in need of someone else to give him the basics of life such as food, drink and clothes. Thus he is favoured in one branch of life but less favoured in others. Similarly if you take a man who is a skilful doctor, superior in the science of medicine, he still needs the architect to build a flat for him to live in and someone to make clothes for him and someone to provide him with food to eat. It is the same with the skilled tailor; he still needs a doctor to treat him and a architect to build his home and a farmer to grow wheat for him to eat.

In other words, each of us is superior in one respect and less proficient in others. This even applies to the garbage collector who cleans the streets and removes the rubbish from our homes. We all need him to do this because if all the rubbish was left where it was, diseases and plagues would spread and the whole place would be a complete mess. He is our superior in respect of the sanitation he provides for us. Even sewage workers are superior to us in this way because if they abandoned their work the streets would be filled with sewage and filth and our life would become impossible. So take care not to belittle the work that anyone does or to say, "I am better than such a one because he works in the sewers and I am a doctor or an architect," for in his way he is superior to you. You have a real need of him because society is not complete unless all of us work together.

In order that society be unified and grow and develop, Allah Almighty has connected it all together by our mutual need for provision, ensuring through it that each man does his work will-

ingly in order to obtain what he needs for the upkeep of himself and his family. This is a necessary procedure and is the basis of good in this existence. If we were all doctors or architects who would bake the loaf of bread we eat in the morning? Who would clean the streets? Who would work in sewers? Any society not based on the integral nature of the mutual dependence of the individuals in it is bound to become corrupted and will not survive or continue. Allah wants each of us to be superior in one aspect which will benefit all society so that life for all becomes possible.

This preface has been necessary in order that all of us may appreciate the secret of goodness in existence. Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – created existence beautiful just as He created it good. Corruption comes about because man was given freedom of choice to do or not to do and began to corrupt existence while claiming to be putting it right. Allah Almighty says:

> *"When it is said to them, 'Do not corrupt the earth,' They say, 'We are simply putting things right.' No indeed! They are the corrupters, but they are not aware of it."*
>
> (2:11-12)

Allah Almighty created existence on a sound and beautiful footing which guarantees a good life for all creation. If man had only accepted to live in accordance with the guidance of Allah Almighty there would be no evil or misery in existence, because Allah Almighty has set up in existence the principles of beauty which preserve it and enable it to carry out its task without any need for human thought to alter or change it. Evil in existence does not come from the creation itself nor from the principles which have been laid down for it. It is man who has introduced things that corrupt it. So in respect of its creation all existence is entirely wonderful. Everything carries out its appointed task as Allah Almighty desires but with harmony and peacefulness far

from anything that causes misery and brings discord into existence.

However, because man is far from Allah's Guidance, he causes illnesses and catastrophes in society which result in misery and evil. That is why Allah Almighty sent Messengers to call us back to His Way in order that they might restore harmony and beauty to society:

> *"We reveal in the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers."* (17:82)

The Qur'an was revealed to cure those sicknesses which have appeared and gone out of control as a result of our being far from Allah's Guidance. When healing takes place and society is cured of the sicknesses which afflict it, mercy returns. However, by his choice, man keeps preferring things other than those prescribed for him by Allah and consequently this evil arises and corruption occurs. The extraordinary thing is that man claims to be putting existence right when all the time he is corrupting it! After we have undergone a time of misery and endured all the aches and pains of the evil we have brought about, mankind will return once again to Allah's Guidance, to the fundamentals of goodness in existence. This time, however, we will not return through belief: instead we will be forced into it because life can only continue when these laws and fundamental principles are applied.

The worst thing is that we Muslims import from unbelieving societies the very things which will corrupt our life and society, and abandon Allah's Guidance which alone can ensure our safety and sanity. Those societies have themselves been forced to begin to revert to the Way of their Creator and have finally discovered that it is only possible for life to be in order if the divinely appointnot ed natural laws are upheld and reapplied. They do this not out of faith but simply because it is the only way that life's difficulties can be resolved.

Chapter Two
Evil in Existence

As we hope we have made clear, Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – put beauty in everything He created and appointed laws to preserve that beauty. Existence is created to be in harmony with the laws of Allah and this applies to everything - to work, to family, to provision and in fact to all of life's activities. Living by the laws of Allah brings you nothing but good. Rejecting the laws of Allah brings you nothing but evil. And that applies not only to this world but both to this world and the Next World. That is why it is said, "There is no good in any good which leads to the Fire and no evil in any evil which leads to the Garden."

How can something good lead to the Fire? Say a man steals in order to give away what he steals as charity. He takes from the rich and gives to the poor and they call him "the noble thief"! Yet it is really impossible to be further away from nobility than that. He imagines he is doing good but in reality he is committing a great evil because by stealing he is taking something Allah has forbidden him to have. So the good which he thinks he is doing will not benefit him in any way, nor will it be accepted from him by Allah, because it comes about by unlawful means. Allah Almighty did not ask anyone to help Him in the task of providing for His creatures. He provides for all. Although unlawful property is provision, it is unlawful provision.

Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – does not permit anyone to give away unlawful property and then claim that he is doing good. It is not in man's power to make the unlawful lawful nor the lawful unlawful. In that regard that Allah Almighty says:

> *"Say: 'What do you think then about the things Allah has sent down to you as provision which you have designated as lawful and unlawful?' Say: 'Has Allah given you permission or are you forging lies against Allah?'"*
>
> (10:59)

Allah Almighty informs us by this that the unlawful and lawful are so by His authority alone and are something which He alone can ordain. It is not permitted for man to make unlawful what Allah has made lawful nor to make lawful what Allah has made unlawful. Allah Almighty does not desire anyone to help Him look after His creation for He has the power to do all things. He is the All-Powerful over all His creatures. No one can commit an unlawful action and then claim that it is good, as we said above: there is no good in a good which leads to the Fire.

Another example of this might be that of a woman who sells her virtue saying she has done so in order to give her children a good upbringing. We say to her, "What you did is unlawful and what you spend on your children will not be accepted from you since Allah has no need of any of this. If you had had a little patience Allah would have provided for you by lawful means which really would have helped you bring up your children properly."

In the same way there is no evil in any evil which leads to the Garden. An example of this might be if you helped someone who was wronged and thus incurred some injury. That is not evil. It is good because you will receive the best reward for it. If you make do without some luxuries and then give away what they would have cost as charity you would profit and not lose because it would be multiplied for you with Allah Almighty.

Once a roasted sheep was given to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and he ordered it to be distributed to the poor and needy. 'A'isha, may Allah be pleased with her, took charge of distributing it but kept one shoulder back because she knew that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, liked the shoulder. When the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, returned and asked about

the sheep, 'A'isha said, "We distributed the meat but we kept the shoulder." He said, "You still have all of it except the shoulder."

This then constitutes the real yardstick of good and evil. It is the yardstick which Allah Almighty has set up in existence. The problem is that man has badly misused the freedom of choice which Allah gave him. Instead of going by the standards of the One who created him and brought him into existence he has tried to set up his own standards. To really understand this we must look at the higher realms of existence, regarding which human beings have no choice. We will find there the most perfect order and the utmost intricacy. All of Allah's creation is given a harmonious life with no misery or injustice.

The sun, the moon, the stars, the planets, the air, and all the things which are not subject to man's will on the earth perform their tasks without anyone complaining about them and without causing anyone fatigue. No one complains that the sun was late in rising or that it shone on some people and hid its rays from others. The order of the planets does not disturb anyone by being imperfect. No one says that he wanted air to breath but could not find any. No one can claim that the rain has been cut off from the earth so as to put an end to life on it. No one can say that the earth is imperfect in the way it revolves so as to throw off what is on its surface into space. None of these things have happened. Indeed all those elements are subject to Allah Almighty and carry out their functions almost without our even being aware of it. So it is clear that all corruption and evil in the earth come from the things regarding which man does have choice. By his choice man interferes, and this interference corrupts things; it does not put things right.

If we look at the origins of human life, we find that Allah Almighty desired from the very beginning to guide us to the Right Way. When Adam descended to earth, Allah sent down Right Guidance with him and asked him to convey to his offspring that this Guidance is from Allah and that whoever follows it will neither go astray nor be wretched. The Noble Qur'an tells us:

> *"He (Allah) said, 'Descend from it, every one of you as enemies one to another! Then when guidance comes to you from Me, those who follow My guidance will not go astray nor will they be miserable.'"* (20:123)

That was the case from the moment man appeared on earth. Allah - glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – made it clear to man that misery and evil proceed from not following Allah's Guidance and that when this Guidance is widespread, as Allah desires, then no evil will occur. Allah made the Right Path clear to us from the beginning. Adam descended to earth with it and conveyed it to his children who, in turn, passed it down to subsequent generations.

It is with the children of Adam that the first of the seeds of evil in existence came to be planted as we know from the story of Qabil and Habil (Cain and Abel) which Allah Almighty relates to us. It entailed the first murder on the face of the earth. If only Qabil had followed the words of Allah Almighty:

> *"Do not kill any person Allah has made inviolate, except with a legal right."* (17:33)

This evil occurred because Qabil diverged from the Right Path and killed someone whom Allah had made inviolate without having a legal right to his life. The story is that Allah Almighty decreed that Hawwa' should give birth to a boy and girl in each of her pregnancies so that human species could be propagated and the earth become populated. The first male was to marry the second female and the second male the first female. But Qabil did not like this because the sister who had been born with him was more beautiful than the one who was born with Habil. He wanted to break the rule and marry his twin. He went to their father Adam, who asked to them to ask Allah Almighty to adjudicate. The Noble Qur'an relates the story to us:

> *"Recite to them in truth the tale of the two sons of Adam when they offered a sacrifice and it was accepted from one of them but not accepted from the other. He said, 'I am going to*

kill you.' He said, 'Allah accepts only from those who are Godfearing.'" (5:27)

This story points out to us that Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – sent down Guidance to Adam when He sent him down to the earth. Man was never without Divine guidance from the first moment he appeared. Allah guided him and made clear to him what would make his life wholesome and sound and how to worship Him and which things bring one near to Him. It is necessary to repeat this because some people claim that Adam descended to earth without guidance and that he and his offspring were left without guidance until Allah later sent Idris as a Prophet and Nuh after him. In claiming that they rely on the fact that the stories of the Prophets begin with Nuh, peace be upon him, taking that to mean that there was no P rophet before him. That is not correct and it is incompatible with the justice of Allah Almighty. Allah Almighty says:

"We never punish until We have sent a Messenger."
(17:15)

In other words, the Right Path must first be conveyed to people in order for there to be justice and then he who obeys can be recompensed and he who disobeys can be punished. If there had been no Right Path, how could Qabil and Habil have sought judgement from Allah Almighty? They had unequivocal knowledge that Allah exists and must exist. If Allah had not told them about the Path, they would not have known that.

The Incapacity of the Human Intellect

It is not possible for us to know the requirements of Allah and how we should worship Him and what will please Him and what will make Him angry by means of the intellect alone. All that the intellect can do is recognise that there is indeed a God of this universe. It can reflect on the signs of existence and the creation

of the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon and so forth. By doing so it brings us to the realisation of the existence of a great Creator. He must be the One who brought these things into existence because no mortal has the power to do that. No one can claim to have created the sun or the moon or the stars or the earth. No one, however great his strength, can claim that he created himself. Those things are completely beyond man's power even if people had joined together to achieve it. So there must be a Creator of this universe who brought it into existence and He is the One who created us.

But who is this Creator? What does He want from us? These are matters beyond the ability of the intellect to grasp. The intellect cannot answer these questions. That is because the power of the intellect stops at the proof that this existence has a Creator and One who brings things into existence. But as for what His name is or what He wants from us or how we can draw near to Him or what will please Him or make Him angry: these are matters beyond the power of the human intellect to ascertain.

The following example might help make this matter more readily understood. If we sit in a locked room and hear a knock at the door, the most we can know is that someone is knocking at the door. But as for who it is, whether it is a man or a woman or a child, what they want, whether they intend good or evil for us or have come to tell us about things we do not know, we can only know these things if we get up and open the door.

However Allah - glory be to Him and may He be exalted! - is the Most Generous and so He did not leave us in bewilderment. He sent Messengers to us to open the doors of Heaven for us and to convey to us that the Creator of this existence is Allah - glory be to Him and may He be exalted! - and that He wants us to worship Him. And so that we do not go astray, He has defined this worship for us and also the means of carrying it out. Through His Messengers He has informed us that there is another life which is eternal, and that in it Allah has prepared perfect bliss for those who obey Him and a painful punishment for those who disobey.

Therefore it is clear that the mercy of Allah Almighty necessitates that human life should have begun on the earth with a Messenger because only they can convey from Allah what He wants us to know: that He is Allah, the Creator who brought everything in existence and that He has appointed for us a particular way of life that we should follow.

The Story of Qabil and Habil

The fact that Qabil and Habil sought the judgement of Allah in their case shows us that they knew of the existence of Allah, the Creator of the universe. The fact that they decided to go to Allah for judgement by the sacrifices they offered is a further indication that they also knew the Right Path and how drawing near to Allah could be accomplished. They knew that it is possible to draw near to Allah Almighty by certain actions and that other actions make Him angry. From this we know that Allah Almighty did not leave man without guidance for a single instant and that the Right Path came down together with Adam to the earth.

As we know, Allah Almighty accepted Habil's sacrifice but not that of Qabil. It is said that that was because Habil offered the best of what he had as a sacrifice whereas Qabil offered the worst. Allah Almighty is good and only accepts the good. It is also said that it was because Habil was pleased with Allah's decree that he should marry Qabil's twin whereas Qabil rejected the judgement and wanted to marry his own twin sister.

Whatever the facts may be, the important thing to us is what the Noble Qur'an mentions: that Allah Almighty accepted the sacrifice of Habil and did not accept that of Qabil. Qabil was forced to acknowledge the fact that Allah had not accepted his sacrifice and he should have asked for Allah's forgiveness and recognised his own delinquency and tried to put it right. But he did not do so. Instead, he was filled with rage and told his brother that he was going to kill him. Habil replied that he would incur no sin no matter what happened. He knew that Allah had

not accepted Qabil's sacrifice because Allah only accepts from the godfearing. Who informed Habil that Allah Almighty only accepts from the godfearing? We know from this that there must have been a way by which Habil knew that Allah does not accept from the disobedient or unbelievers but only from the godfearing. The story continues as Allah Almighty tells us that Qabil killed his brother:

> *"His self prompted him to kill his brother; so he killed him and became one of the losers."* (5:30)

Whether the killing took place, as has been reported, by means of a piece of iron or whether a stone was used does not concern us here. What does concern us is that this was the first crime that happened in human history and the first opposition on the earth we know of to Allah's Guidance. It was the first opposition that occurred to the prescribed will of Allah.

There is no Hesitation in Disobedience

This was the rapid display of the first occurrence of evil in existence and Allah Almighty wants to show us that it came about from opposition to His Way. If Qabil had obeyed Allah and clung to His Way, he would have refrained from killing his brother. This was the beginning of man's disobedience to his Lord and the evil which that entails. The Noble Qur'an tells us the stories of the Prophets and Messengers, Nuh, Hud, Salih, Shu'ayb, Lut, Musa, and others; and we see in them how Allah intervened to punish the unbelievers and destroy them. The Noble Qur'an reports to us:

> *"Each one of them We seized for his wrong action. Against some We sent a sudden squall of stones and some of them were seized by the Great Shout and some of them We caused the earth to swallow up and some of them We drowned. Allah would not wrong them. Rather it was they who wronged themselves."* (29:40)

But how is it that people go off the Path? Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – tells us how this happens when He tells us in His Book how He made us bear witness to Him while we were in the World of Spirits before our birth in this world:

> *"When your Lord took out from the loins of the children of Adam all their descendants and made them bear witness against themselves: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'We bear witness that indeed You are!' Lest you say on the Day of Rising, 'We were unmindful of this.' Or lest you say, 'Our forefathers associated others with Allah before, and we are merely their descendants coming after them. Are You then going to destroy us for what those falsifiers did?'"* (7:172-173)

So deviating from the Way of Allah comes about in two ways. The first is either from heedlessness of it, which causes people to forget it or distort it, or through inventing words which are not from Allah while claiming that they are. They forget those things in the Way of Allah that are contrary to their own desires, or if they do not actually forget they distort. If they do not distort what has come from Allah what they do is come up with words which accord with what they desire and then ascribe them falsely to Allah Almighty. Allah Almighty says about that:

> *"Woe to those who write the Book with their own hands and then say, 'This is from Allah,' to sell it for a cheap price. Woe to them for what their hands have written! Woe to them for what they earn!"* (1:79)

This is a kind of heedlessness which penetrates the heart and makes it blind to Allah's Guidance.

Then the second thing which makes people distant from Allah's Way is imitation of their fathers. The fathers begin to leave Allah's Guidance and their sons imitate them and distort it even more than they did in their search for worldly gain. Then the next generation after them comes and imitates their fathers

and very soon the result is complete alienation. Allah Almighty calls our attention to this tendency when He says:

> *"When it is said to them, 'Follow what Allah has sent down to you,' They say, 'We follow what we found our fathers doing.' What if their fathers did not understand a thing and were not guided?"* (1:170)

Thus heedlessness of Allah's Guidance and imitation of our fathers are the basic causes of disobedience and disbelief. That is why Allah Almighty called our attention to these two excuses which will not be accepted in the Next World. We were cautioned about them when we were in the World of Spirits so that none of us would be able to use these two things to excuse ourselves on the Day of Rising.

Muhammad – a Mercy to both Believer and Unbeliever

Allah intervened to punish the unbelievers until the Message of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, came and then the Divine punishment of unbelievers in this world ceased. There were two reasons for this. The first is that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was sent as a mercy to all beings, both believers and unbelievers. This mercy is for all human beings. The door of repentance is open to all until the moment they die. Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – accepts repentance from all His slaves as long as their life continues on the earth and until the sun rises from the West, heralding the arrival of the Last Hour. This mercy was given to all humanity at the hand of the Master of Mankind, our master Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him.

The second reason is that Allah Almighty entrusted the community of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, with the task of conveying the Message and teaching the

unbelievers. That can be seen from His words:

> *"You are the best nation brought out to mankind. You command the right and prohibit the wrong and believe in Allah."* (3:110)

Good and Evil in the World Today

As we are talking about good and evil in existence, we should talk about the contemporary world because the evil and misery in it are greater than in any other age. The main cause of this misery is that people have abandoned Allah's Guidance and have made their own laws and it is this human legislation which now rules the majority of the world and has replaced the Laws which Allah Almighty laid down for putting existence right. This is the cause of the misery and wretchedness which have afflicted the entire world despite all the amazing material and scientific advances which have taken place.

We must realise that the human intellect, however high its level of attainment might be, is nevertheless still deficient and limited. Whatever the extent of people's knowledge, they can still only know a few things while the vast majority of things remain hidden from them. They cannot possibly be aware of everything. This is why we find that in the case of all human laws there is need for alteration after only a few years because the human intellect was not able to perceive the things which were going to appear and necessitate the change. Human laws continue to require constant revision and remain full of gaps. In this way Allah gives people proof and evidence that their intellects are deficient and limited and not qualified to legislate unaided for the life of man.

Anyone who sees the need to recover from the havoc wrought by present-day laws in the world and to fill the gaps which they have left must surely also see the need to apply the Law of Allah, He who knows every thing, He who created man and knows what is right for him. Clearly the person who makes something

is the person best qualified to stipulate the laws governing its maintenance. If we want to get a tool mended we either go direct to the manufacturer or to what we are told in the manual where the manufacturer stipulated the rules of maintenance, or at any rate to someone who has been trained by the manufacturer and given instructions about how to mend it. But where Allah's Guidance is concerned we neglect to follow even the same principles we follow in respect of our life in this world. This is the main reason for evil and misery in the world.

Some nations which are wretched on account of what they have prescribed for themselves have begun to review the legislation they have enacted. Those nations altered the laws of Allah and abolished capital punishment. Now they have begun to cry out for help on account of the increase in murder in their societies. They have found no other way than to return to Allah's Guidance which decrees that murderers should be executed.

In respect of divorce, Allah Almighty has permitted it. We find in the Noble Qur'an:

> *"Divorce can be pronounced twice and then there is retaining with correctness and courtesy or letting go with good will."* (2:229)

However the Catholic Church came and abolished divorce and said that marriage is forever with no possibility of divorce. That is a law of this world. The inevitable result is that troubles, difficulties, family misery and other things have grown to such an extent that the Church was eventually forced to allow divorce. This retraction did not take place because of belief in Islam. The Church allowed it out of necessity because life was not possible without it. There are some problems which arise between couples when divorce is better and more harmonious than continued married life. On the day that the Catholic Church permitted divorce, twenty thousand divorce cases were presented in Rome alone.

In regard to breast-feeding, Allah Almighty says in His Noble Book:

"Mothers can nurse their children for two full years - for those who wish to complete the full term of nursing."

(2:233)

Then in the Western world people appeared who claimed that bottle-feeding was better and more beneficial to babies than breast-feeding. Companies producing milk powder for children falsely announced that their products, having been fortified by vitamins and other things, were better for the child than its mother's milk! Later it became apparent that children not fed from their mother's milk for two full years are liable to grow up afflicted by psychological and neurotic illnesses which ruin them so that they grow up lacking tenderness and attachment to the family and are rebellious towards their parents. Many psychological illnesses have appeared causing whole generations to be lost and leading them to dependency on drugs and other things. There is now a universal complaint about children and their disobedience to their parents. And suddenly those who yesterday demanded that breast-feeding should be abandoned are seeking to return to it. Conferences are held about the virtues of breast-feeding and what a necessity it is in ensuring the healthiness of the child so that it grows up sound in body and mind.

The amazing thing is that we in the Muslim world have taken up the cry and returned to breast-feeding without remembering or being reminded that this is what Allah Almighty commanded us in the Noble Qur'an in the first place. He gave us the sound method of bringing up our children, but instead of being in accord with it, we imitated the western nations in tending to bottle-feed! We did not understand that it is opposition to Allah's Guidance which has lost these generations. There are dozens and dozens more examples of how the misery and evil which now afflict the life of man have come from opposition to the Guidance of Allah.

It is said that cutting off the hand of a thief is barbaric but it is forgotten that the punishment in Islam is designed to prevent the crime and deter the criminal. If a thief knows that if he steals his hand will be cut off he will not proceed to commit the theft.

The result of failing to conform to this text is that the world is full of thefts and bands of thieves and that ordinary honest people have begun to live in continual fear. Violence mars the lives of thousands of people every day. If we had followed Allah's Guidance and cut off the hand of thieves, there would have been far less theft in the world. But by our human legislation, we have increased the misery of mankind and we have increased the evil in the world without achieving any positive result.

This misery will continue as long as there is opposition to Allah's Guidance. Because of His limitless knowledge, nothing is hidden from Him – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! He is the Creator of the human soul and the One best able to set down laws for them which will be beneficial for them and which will put life in order. The entire world is in a mess, going round in circles and filled with evil and misery. There is no way to solve its problems except by returning to the Laws of Allah, whether this happens through belief or out of sheer necessity.

To conclude this chapter, we should mention two important points. The first is what people say regarding the apparent lack of fair distribution of the earth's resources. Some people have enough for their needs and more, while other people cannot even find enough for their basic needs. The second is that most people see good in wealth alone. Anyone who is provided with wealth by Allah believes that it is a sign of Allah's favour. Anyone not provided with wealth by Allah considers this to be a sign of anger from Allah and lack of acceptance.

All this comes from lack of understanding. What Allah has assigned to His creatures will be enough for them until the Day of Rising. Wealth is in fact a test for people from Allah. It can even represent retribution from Allah or lack of His favour and be a means of making disbelief continue – we seek refuge with Allah from that! That happens when man believes that he is completely independent and does not lift his hands to heaven and say, "O Lord!" Then he leaves this world without having a single good action to intercede for him in the Next World.

Chapter 3
The Uncertain and the Assured

All people seek good but few recognise where it really lies. People generally pursue the good things of this world and forget about the Next World. This is very short-sighted indeed and furthermore it is logically defective, because someone who does that exchanges something assured for something which is at best uncertain. For instance, take a father who does everything to prepare his son for the life of this world and spends all his money to that end. He chooses the best schools for him despite the exorbitant costs involved. He exhausts himself in order to ensure his entry into the best colleges of the university despite the hardship which doing that entails. If you ask him why he is doing that he will tell you that it is for his son, that he is preparing him for a good future. But the truth is that if you do this you are expending all your efforts on an uncertainty because everything you are doing is based on an assumption, the assumption that your son will live and work hard and become a famous man.

But how do you know that this will happen? How do you know that your son will be have the ability complete all these studies? And even if he does complete them, how do you know that a woman will not then come and seduce him or marry him and be a bad influence on him, or that Shaytan will not corrupt him with one of the disorders which bring ruin and lay waste to the future, like wine, drugs or gambling or other such things? Then your son's future will be completely ruined and all your aspirations will have been futile. Or his life may be short and death may come to put an end to these hopes you had.

You prepared him for the life of this world but did you prepare him for the Next World? Are you ready to spend a half or even a quarter of what you spent on preparing him for the life of this world to prepare him for the Next Life? Have you taught him how to pray or how to recite the Qur'an? Have you taught him truthfulness, trustworthiness, to be charitable to the poor, to help those in need, and to maintain ties of kinship? Or have you neglected all of that and paid no attention to those things? You have not commanded him to pray although you see that he does not do it. You have not spoken to him about the pleasure of Allah and what he must do to obtain it. You have not recompensed him for a trust he has kept nor for the truth he has spoken nor for an injustice he committed. You have not done any of these things even though you are required to give primary importance to Allah's Guidance.

The worldly future, for whose sake you exert yourself, may or may not come about but you and your son and all of Allah's creation will most certainly meet Allah on the Day of Rising, and Allah Almighty will most certainly judge them, and most certainly they will be given bliss in the Garden or be punished in the Fire. By this conduct of yours you have taken something uncertain and devoted all your concern to it and you have ignored what is certain to happen: the encounter with Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! You did not give that any importance nor pay any attention to it even though it is vital, as you would soon see if you used your intellect properly, to prepare yourself, your son and your family for what is assured. If the preparation for that is not for what is uncertain it should at least be equal.

The Real Life

Many people are not able to use their minds and intellects to define properly where good lies. This calls our attention to the fact that it is impossible to judge good and evil using worldly criteria. Allah Almighty says:

slaves by Allah Almighty. The test in itself is not blameworthy. It becomes blameworthy or praiseworthy according to the result. Allah Almighty puts His slaves to the test with both good and evil in this world, i.e. by what they believe is good for them, and what they believe is evil for them, in accordance with the words of Allah:

"We test you with both evil and good as a trial." (21:35)

Good is a trial for mankind, as is evil also, because the life of this world is in fact nothing but tests and trials for people. When Sulayman, peace be upon him, had the righteous man deliver the throne of Bilqis in the twinkling of an eye, he admitted that Allah was testing him by that. Where is the test or trial in that event? Sulayman, peace be upon him, knew that he had been less favoured in knowledge than the righteous man who was able to accomplish that feat, and the trial lay in the fact that Sulayman, peace be upon him, knew by this that there were slaves of Allah with greater knowledge than him.

Given that, he could do one of two things. He could either thank Allah Almighty, understanding that he should not be distracted by the kingdom which Allah had given him and should acknowledge that Allah gives whatever He will to whomever He will, and thus be protected from delusion which is the beginning of disbelief. We seek refuge with Allah! Or he could be disturbed by what had happened and say, "O my Lord! How is it that You have given me all this kingdom and then You prefer one of my slaves above me?" This reaction would have indicated envy and entry into disbelief. However, Sulayman, peace be upon him, was aware of this trial. That is why he said, as the Noble Qur'an tells us:

"If someone gives thanks he only does so to his own gain." (27:40)

The meaning of that is that being thankful to Allah Almighty does not increase His kingdom in any way. Indeed thankfulness

to Allah Almighty and praising and extolling Him cannot affect Allah's power because He is in any case Absolute Perfection. Thankfulness merely brings Allah's reward to the one who expresses it. In the same way disbelief does not harm Allah in any way. If all of Allah's creation were to disbelieve, they would not decrease His kingdom one iota. Allah is Rich beyond need of all existence. That is why Allah Almighty says:

> *"And if anyone shows ingratitude my Lord is Rich beyond need, Generous."* (27:4)

However, usually when Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – honours man and gives him blessings, he says, *"My Lord has rightly honoured me,"* but when He constricts his provision, he says, *"My Lord has humiliated me."* This is how man tends to measure good and evil. He considers expansion of provision and the number of his blessings to be the measure of good and the pleasure of Allah Almighty and considers constriction of provision to be the measure of Allah's anger and the absence of His pleasure.

Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – does not confirm this faulty understanding that people have. He says, *"No, indeed,"* meaning, "You understand this wrongly." Abundance of blessings and good do not indicate Allah's pleasure, and scant provision and good do not indicate Allah's anger. Rather both of them are a trial for man so that he can stand as a witness against himself on the Day of Rising. Did he greet the decree of Allah with pleasure and thankfulness or did he greet it with disbelief and ingratitude?

Then Allah proceeds to enumerate those things which cause the removal of blessing from man. The first of them, as the Noble Qur'an relates to us, is: *"No indeed! You do not honour orphans."* Allah Almighty has stipulated that care of orphans is the first reason for the continuation of blessing and humiliation of them is the first reason for its loss. Why is that? The reason is that Allah desires that there should be mutual responsibility in society and that the strong should not prey on the weak. And

who could be weaker than an orphan, a child who has lost his father and is therefore shattered and vulnerable and without protection? It is easy for any man to take such a child's property and humiliate him and to do what he likes with him because he has neither strength nor power.

Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – desires that all who live in an Islamic society should be untroubled concerning the guardianship of their children if they leave the life of this world. That is why He made the care of orphans the highest of actions in His eyes. This is so much the case that if you stroke with tenderness an orphan's head, you have the reward of good actions according to the number of the hairs on it, a good action for every single hair! Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – therefore calls our attention to the magnitude of the reward for caring for orphans and being kind to them. The repayment for humiliating orphans is not only in the Next World either, it is also in this world, because Allah Almighty will remove blessings from you if you humiliate the orphan and are harsh to him. Read the words of the Almighty:

> *"Have you seen him who denies the deen? That means him who harshly rebuffs the orphan."* (107:1-2)

A believer would not have the audacity to be harsh in dealing with the orphan. Actually, such audacity comes from those who deny the *deen*.

The Causes for the Removal of Blessing

Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – calls our attention to the another of the causes for the removal of blessing when He says:

> *"Nor do you urge the feeding of the poor."* (89:18)

This means you do not urge each other to feed those poor people who have less than they need. Some people believe that the poor are those who have absolutely nothing at all, but the poor are in reality those who do not possess enough for their needs. That is indicated by the words of Allah Almighty:

> *"As for the boat, it belonged to some poor people who worked on the sea."* (18:79)

This shows that the term "poor" refers to those who do not possess enough to sustain themselves properly because those men were poor in spite of the fact that they possessed a boat.

Another of the reasons for the removal of blessings is that people are selfish. Indeed, at times they urge and call on people not to offer food to the poor. Food is the most genuine demand because when someone asks you for money they may be trying to gain wealth. When they ask you for clothes they may not need them but might be asking for them in order to sell them. Whereas if people ask you for a loaf to eat, it must be that they are actually hungry and unable to find food. Therefore those who deny food to the poor commit a great sin which removes the blessing from them.

Then Allah Almighty says:

> *"And you devour inheritance voraciously, and love wealth and property insatiably."* (89:19-20)

This is also one of the things that removes blessings – that you usurp under false pretences an inheritance belonging to someone else. You usurp their right while they are young or you obstruct it in order to take a part of their inheritance when they are adults, when the owner of the property has died and it is possible to get some of it without any fear that anyone will find you out. This of course constitutes unlawful wealth and Allah will punish you for it in this world by removing the blessing from you – quite apart from the reckoning in the Next World.

The Function of Wealth

Love of wealth leads a person to hoard it up so that it fails to fulfil its proper function. Property has a function in the activities of life. When you obstruct it from its function, life is corrupted by wealth being withheld and the doors of provision being shut in people's faces. All wealth that is spent automatically opens the doors of provision in society whether this is intended or not. For instance, someone who wants to build a building is probably not thinking about benefiting society. He simply wants to become a property owner and insure himself against the evil of poverty.

But what does he actually do? He opens the gates of provision to the architect who draws up the plans for him and for the owners of the land where the building is built, for those who excavate the foundations, for those who lay the concrete and iron, for the builders who erect the building, for the ironsmiths and carpenters, for the makers of pipes and sanitation ware, and for the factories which produce cement, iron, glass and aluminium and bricks, and for so many others involved in the construction work. So by this one action the gates of provision are opened to many workers and artisans and several factories. The activities of life continue and society benefits since you have built a building. You may not have had any of this in mind but it is clear that society benefits.

However, when you prevent wealth from fulfilling its function, you commit a great sin in respect of society as a whole and people as individuals. Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – does not desire Islamic society to be impoverished and self-absorbed with constricted provision. If you love money, the lover always desires to be with the one he loves! So if you hoard it up and prevent it from carrying out its task, what will happen on the Day of Rising? Allah Almighty says about those who hoard up:

"Those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it

in the way of Allah, give them good news of a painful punish - ment on the day it is heated up in the fire of Jahannam, and their foreheads and sides and backs are branded with it: 'This is what you hoarded up for yourselves! Taste then the things you were hoarding.'" (9:35)

Love of wealth makes you seek it by any means. You do not differentiate between the lawful and unlawful and between the good and the foul. You will amass wealth from any place and any source you can. Your only concern is to increase it, no matter whether you violate the sacred things of Allah or commit injustice and corruption in the earth. You will do anything in your quest for wealth. Then Allah will remove it from you in this world and its blessing will depart.

Wealth and Influence – Blessing or Affliction?

People believe that wealth constitutes unqualified good but the truth is otherwise because wealth can often be an affliction for you instead a blessing. You believe that the pleasure of Allah lies in wealth, influence and power while in fact those things often indicate a lack of Divine pleasure. Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – makes that clear in His Mighty Book. He gives us several examples where wealth proves to be a path to disbelief, tyranny and disobedience. One such example can be seen in the words of Allah Almighty:

"What do you think about the one who argued with Ibrahim about his Lord, on the basis that Allah had given him kingship? When Ibrahim said, 'My Lord is Him who gives life and makes die,' he said, 'I too give life and cause to die.' Ibrahim said, 'Allah makes the sun come from the East. Make it come from the West.' The one who rejected was dumbfound - ed. Allah does not guide wrongdoing people." (2:258)

It does not matter who this man was: the stories of the

Qur'an are not concerned with specific individuals but are intended to show us the path of belief. Stories in the Qur'an are applicable to every time and place, being universal and not based on the particular characters involved, with the exception, that is, of the story of Maryam daughter of 'Imran and 'Isa her son, peace be upon both of them, which is, of course, a unique story whose characters are specific and defined in the Noble Qur'an and not subject to repetition or analogy in any way.

So when the man came to Ibrahim, peace be upon him, seeking guidance he began to argue with Ibrahim disputing Allah's Guidance. Allah Almighty had given him a kingdom and along with it influence, power, and wealth. But instead of being thankful to Allah for His blessings and appreciating Allah's favour to him, he began to argue with Ibrahim using the arguments of disbelief. It is as if the kingdom which Allah had given him, rather than making him a believer, had made him disbelieve – We seek refuge with Allah – and deny the existence of Allah Almighty.

When Ibrahim, peace be upon him, pointed out to him that Allah Almighty is He who gives life and He who will take it back again that did not make him acknowledge the supremacy of Allah Almighty. He said, *"I too give life and cause to die."* How can a man give life and cause to die? This man to whom Allah had given the kingdom said, "Bring me a man." Then he said, "Kill him," but before the killing took place, he said, "I have pardoned you." Then he turned to Ibrahim, claiming that this showed he was able to give life and cause death. By issuing the command for the man be executed he had made him die and by pardoning him he had returned life to him, thus giving him life! His blessing, kingdom and wealth did not increase this man in belief and thankfulness to Allah Almighty, but on the contrary it increased him in disbelief. We seek refuge with Allah! Then Ibrahim, peace be upon him, challenged him with a cosmic sign beyond any human power, namely the sun, and said to him, *"Allah makes the sun come from the East. Make it come from the West."* Then the truth struck him, and he was dumbfounded because he had not examined or turned to the signs of Allah in existence.

Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – tells us that when man is distracted by wealth and sees it as a sign of strength and influence he thereby forgets Allah's bounty to him, since it is Allah who provided him with his wealth. In such a case he shows himself inordinate. Inordinacy means to exceed the limits; it means taking something to which you have no right. That is why Allah Almighty says:

> *"No indeed! Man truly is inordinate, seeing himself as totally self-sufficient."* (96:6-7)

Wealth makes man inordinate and makes him imagine that he is able to achieve anything by his own strength. He considers himself the master of his wealth which enables him to achieve what he wants, and supposes himself independent of Allah Almighty without any need of His help or His pleasure. The story of Qarun demonstrates this to us with great clarity. Allah gave Qarun wealth beyond what He had given any other of His creatures. But did this blessing increase him in belief, thankfulness and remembrance of Allah - or did it delude him into ascribing his wealth to himself and claiming that he had obtained it by his own knowledge and strength and not by the bounty of Allah? This is what the Noble Qur'an tells us:

> *"Qarun was one of the people of Musa and he was over-weening towards them. We gave him treasure, the keys to which alone made up a heavy load for a group of strong men. When his people said to him, 'Do not exult. Allah does not love people who exult.'"* (28:76)

Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – gave Qarun treasures and wealth beyond what He had given to any other of His slaves. But this wealth, instead of making him prostrate to Allah in gratitude, deluded him, making him oppressive to people and a corrupter of the earth. When they reminded him of Allah's Guidance, he said, as the Noble Qur'an tells us:

> *"'I have only been given it on account of some knowledge I possess.'"* (28:78)

Qarun ascribed his wealth to himself and forgot Allah's bounty to him. He supposed himself independent of Allah Almighty. What was the end result of his inordinacy and disbelief? Read the words of Allah Almighty about the fate of Qarun:

> *"We caused the earth to swallow up both him and his house. There was no group to come to his aid, besides Allah, and he was not one of those who receive help."*
>
> (28:81)

It can therefore be seen that wealth is often an affliction for its possessor, because if his belief is weak he feels that it makes him independent of Allah Almighty and it causes him to reject Allah and ascribe his fortune to himself. But he will most certainly die, leaving all his wealth behind, and meet Allah in the Next World alone without wealth or rank, where He will punish him with the most terrible punishment. In such a case is wealth a blessing or an affliction?

When man's provision is scanty he is usually able to perceive his need of Allah but when wealth comes to him, his life and the life of his family is corrupted. Wealth frequently leads the sons of many people to addiction to drugs or gambling. Or it may be that Allah will afflict him with an incurable disease which will mean he has to spend thousands on doctors and medical expenses. He may have to take bitter medicine and undergo painful treatment without becoming well. He may be in pain and be deprived of every normal comfort. His house might contain all that a human being could desire in the way of food and drink, but he is unable to enjoy any of it. He cannot place a single morsel in his mouth. He cannot eat a single bite of meat which

he loves. When he eats it, it causes him unbearable pain. Is this good?

These examples and yet others which the Noble Qur'an gives us corroborate for us that wealth is not an absolute good, as some people suppose. It may be that a man will come to curse the wealth which has destroyed his life, removed his tranquillity and brought his children misery. Such is the punishment of this world. So long as he does not fear Allah in respect of his wealth, Allah will not protect him in it. Indeed He will give it mastery over him so that it leads him to Hell. We seek refuge with Allah!

Chapter Four
The Nature of Good and Evil

Before we can properly discuss good and evil, it is first necessary to define what good is and what evil is because many people are mistaken in their understanding of them. Good is in reality what takes you successfully to a goal beyond which there is no "after". Man is born in this world and then perhaps grows up and obtains primary, preparatory and secondary certificates and then graduates from university. Then he obtains his Master's decree or doctorate and lives his life in this world until he dies. After that, he is resurrected. If he was righteous, he enters the Garden. This is Eternal Bliss after which there is nothing else; there is nothing "after" the Garden. So the goal of life is to reach the bliss of the Garden. You only gain this goal when what you want coincides with Allah's Guidance. Then you gain the true good apart from which there really is no other good.

We usually think of evil as being that which is incompatible with what we desire. Everything we desire and do not achieve is considered to be evil. For instance, if you are a merchant and make a contract in the expectation of making a great profit and then the prices change and instead of making a profit you make a loss, you consider that what has happened to you is evil. When you want a job and do not manage to get it you consider this evil. Evil then in human terms is what is incompatible with our desires, appetites and passions but we fail to consider whether what we want is in keeping with Allah's Guidance or not.

When someone wants to reach a goal, he must exert himself or expend effort to achieve it. For example, if a student desires to

be successful in an exam he will go to school every day and stay up at night to revise, putting up with a lot and restraining himself from spending the evening with his friends or watching programmes he likes on television or joining in with the family in their social events. He will continue to study, sleeping but little, until he achieves his goal.

On the other hand, human experience shows us that someone who indulges all his desires does not obtain good in his life, for in order to obtain good there must inevitably be action, effort, and sacrifice. A person who spends most of his time playing games and who indulges all his appetites and enjoys himself every minute may satisfy his immediate desires but he will never reach the goal. He has no future nor will his life give him any nobility. It is like that with everything in this world. If a merchant does not try and seek out good quality merchandise with a reasonable price which people will agree to pay and if he is not known for trustworthiness and honesty he ends up bankrupt and does not achieve what he wants.

The True Meaning of Good

True good is what comes from Allah Almighty because it is the enduring thing which does not vanish. It does not increase or decrease, grow or diminish. Everything in the world diminishes except for the good which is with Allah Almighty. It is multiplied many times over.

The proverb says: "Wealth is a good servant but a bad master." When you obtain wealth and you are able to use it to achieve what you want and it brings you what you desire you make it your servant. But when you hoard it up and your goal is simply to amass wealth, whether lawful or unlawful, then it becomes your master and you become its slave and it does not benefit you. On the contrary, it imprisons you. It denies you what you desire because you do not want to spend it nor enjoy it since you are reluctant to part with it.

It is necessary to know that wealth in itself does not constitute provision. It is provision when you buy things with it but you cannot use it directly. In order to make this clear let us suppose that you have two mountains of gold and silver and you are hungry and thirsty. Can you eat the gold mountain or drink the silver mountain? Of course not. If someone were to come with a full waterskin and offer to sell it to you for half the mountain of gold and the only alternative was that you would die of thirst, would you not give him half? If someone came to you with food when you were about to die of hunger and asked you for half of the mountain of silver, would you not give to him? Of course you would. So wealth is not immediate provision. You cannot eat it or drink it. It is indirect provision. You use it to buy the things to eat or drink or wear which Allah has allotted to you.

The same applies to everything you encounter in this world. If you make it subject to Allah's Guidance it is good. If you remove it from the sphere of Allah's Guidance it is evil. If you use wealth to help the poor, needy and orphans, and in righteous actions, then it is good. If you use it to cause corruption in the earth then it is evil. If you use rank to eliminate injustice, fulfil people's needs, and judge by the truth it is good. If you use it to wrong people, exceed the limits and oppress it is evil. If you spend your life in righteous action it is good. If you spend it harming people and wronging them it is evil. So the value of everything depends on the way you use it. Evil, as we said previously, proceeds from man according what use he makes of things.

Man and the Events of Life

There are many events in life but all of them fall into three main categories. The first are those concerning which you have neither power nor choice. They are the decrees of Allah Almighty. Suppose, for instance, you are travelling on a road and a rock falls on you or a car hits you. Those events and others like

them happen to you without any choice or your part or your being able to fend them off. There are also events which happen to you through other people. For instance, suppose that suddenly a man starts a fight with you or assaults you in the street and pushes you so that you fall down, and so forth. Thirdly, there are also the events in which you do exercise choice which first and foremost concern Allah's Guidance given to you.

Though Allah Almighty says to you, "Do," you can, by your choice, choose not to do. Otherwise Allah Almighty would not have had to say "Do," to you Likewise, when Allah Almighty says to you, "Do not do," you are able by your choice to do. Otherwise, Allah Almighty would not have had to say, "Do not do." Allah - glory be to Him and may He be exalted! - appointed human choice so that there could be a reckoning, reward and punishment, and so that the reward and the punishment would be just. However, the same of course applies in all aspects of your daily life: the things you eat, the people you sit with, the clothes you wear and other such things.

The matters in respect of which you cannot interfere and about which you cannot exercise your will and which do not happen by your choice are the decree of Allah which He wills in His universe. The decree of Allah Almighty is always good, even if appears to us in our narrow view and limited knowledge to be evil. All that comes from Allah is good. What causes our breast to become constricted and our endurance to falter is simply the fact that we do not see the perfection in front of us. Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – gives us an example of this in *Surat al-Kahf* in the meeting which took place between Musa, peace be upon him, and the righteous servant.

All the actions which the righteous servant performed seemed evil in Musa's eyes. He travelled in a ship belonging to some poor people and then holed it so that it would sink; he met a youth who had not yet reached the age of responsibility and killed him for no crime; and then he entered a town of people who refused to give them even a morsel of bread when they were hungry and he built up for them a wall that was on the point of falling down.

All these actions, from the point of view of Musa, peace be upon him, were evil but the truth was that they were all the decrees of Allah and full of good. He holed the ship so that it would be not confiscated by an unjust king. It was saved by his action and remained for the poor people to use for their living. The boy would have led his parents to inordinacy and disbelief and so Allah replaced him with another righteous son for them. He showed mercy to them by taking their other son before the age of responsibility so that he would enter the Garden without reckoning. The wall he built up had a treasure under it which belonged to the two sons of a righteous man. By this action Allah preserved it for them until they became adults when they could take it instead of it being usurped by the people of the town.

From this it should be clear to us that we cannot always judge events by their surface appearance since we do not see the entire picture. We see some aspects but miss many others. Allah - glory be to Him and may He be exalted! - says in His Noble Book:

> *"And the amount of knowledge you have been given is very little."* (17:85)

The Almighty also says:

> *"But most people do not know."* (30:6)

We must simply accept the fact that all that comes from Allah is good without us necessarily knowing the wisdom in it. Allah Almighty makes it clear to us that we are not qualified to judge events or what happens to us in this existence. That is why we find many *ayats* in the Mighty Book of Allah which ask us not to measure events by our understanding or our limited knowledge. The Almighty says:

> *"It may be that you hate something and it is good for you; and it may be that you love something and it is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know."* (1:216)

Thus Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – informs us that we are not qualified to judge the events which happen to us in life. We may dislike something that happens to us although it contains much good, we do not know that and believe that it is a bad thing when in fact it is a good thing which Allah Almighty desires for us. Sometimes we believe that what happens is good for us and we love it and are delighted with it when in reality it is evil and a very great evil at that. We must not, therefore, involve ourselves in judging the events which happen to us independently of our wishes, because human beings are not able to distinguish between good and evil and are ignorant of the true significance of what happens. But we must take them as being good. The decrees of Allah only bring people good whereas all evil comes from the work of mankind.

Let us say that a man is rich or possesses a kingdom and then Allah strips him of it or removes wealth from him. This man believes that what happened to him is evil and so he curses this world, is angry with it and complains to Allah of His decrees, but the reality is quite different. Read what Allah Almighty says:

> *"Say, 'O Allah! Possessor of sovereignty! You give sovereignty to anyone You will. You take sovereignty from anyone You will. You exalt anyone You will. You abase anyone You will. All good is in Your hands. You are Absolutely Powerful over all things.'"* (3:26)

Allah Almighty continues to tell us to turn to Him with His words, *"All good is in Your hands."* So giving sovereignty is good and taking it away is also good. No one disagrees about giving sovereignty. No one disagrees that that is good. If Allah gives sovereignty to someone, he interprets this as good and everyone interprets it as good, but how can removing sovereignty be good? Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – says, *"You take sovereignty from anyone You will."*

The removal of sovereignty never takes place by choice. It is Allah Almighty who takes it away from people in spite of what

they want. They try to retain firm possession of sovereignty but Allah takes it from them by force. Allah Almighty sees the whole picture and looks at the events of this world and what they lead to for man: the Fire in which there is eternal punishment or the Garden in which there is eternal bliss. There is in reality no separation between events: events are connected, causes and effects are interconnected. Anyone who performs righteous actions finds the Garden in the Next World and anyone who causes corruption in the earth and is disobedient will find punishment in the Next World.

Causes lead to effects. Sound causes lead to sound effects. If the causes are corrupt they can only have corrupt effects. Sovereignty results in strength, mastery, power and obeyed command. Sometimes it seduces man into aggression and tyranny, and sometimes into wronging people. When Allah Almighty removes sovereignty from man, by doing that He may be saving him from acts of disobedience which would land him in the Fire for all eternity. By His knowledge, which encompasses all things, Allah Almighty knows that a man will be tyrannical, inordinate and unjust. By His mercy, He wants to save this man from a terrible punishment and so He takes away sovereignty from him to save him from a future catastrophe and to save him from eternal misery. Is this good or is it evil? When sovereignty is taken from him, a man considers that something evil, indeed a great evil, has befallen him, but in the Next World he will come and praise Allah Almighty and prostrate to Him out of gratitude because by that Allah saved him from the Fire.

The same applies to all power in this world. It can make man disobedient to Allah and put him far from Him and make him an oppressor and a tyrant. When Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – removes this power, he wakes up, takes note and realises his need of Allah. He lifts his hands to Heaven and says, "O Lord!" It causes him to take the Straight Path after being on the crooked path which leads to destruction.

Thus every decree of Allah Almighty, even if it outwardly appears to us or to our human understanding to be evil, is in

reality good. Allah Almighty created us and subjected to us everything in the heavens and the earth. He desires good for us, but man seeks to hasten other things despite his lack of knowledge, heedless of the fact that Allah Almighty has His decrees and His wisdom in His kingdom and that although we know some things even more things are hidden from us.

Someone may feel despondent and say, "I prayed to Allah for such-and-such but He did not respond!" They should be told, "There may be good and giving in receiving an answer but there is also good and giving in the lack of response. It may well be that you asked for something bad for you unknowingly. If Allah had granted your prayer, then terrible harm would have befallen you."

It is not true that a mother will sometimes curse her children in moments of aggravation and anger? When a man is upset does he not sometimes curse the closest people to him? What would happen if Allah Almighty answered the invocation of the mother by taking her children and actually making them die? Would the mother be happy in that instance? Would she thank Allah Almighty for answering her prayer? The same thing applies when a father curses his children or a wife curses her husband in a momentary dispute. If Allah were to answer them they would suffer great sorrow and profound harm and therefore the lack of answer is a gift for them and good for them. Allah Almighty says about that:

> *"Man prays for evil just as he prays for good. Man is prone to be impetuous."* (17:11)

From this you can see that a prayer which you suppose to be good and want to be answered may in fact be evil for you. That is because you do not know the entire picture. The Unseen and what will happen is veiled from you. You assess good according to the time or moment you are in but these criteria are faulty because things may happen after that which make this thing which you imagined to be good to be in reality a terrible evil

even though you might be insistent in the prayer and seek to hasten the answer! But Allah, by His wisdom, does not answer you because He, by His knowledge, desires to save you from a future evil which is concealed from you.

You might, for instance, desire to be near to a ruler or someone with influence but it may be that future events will remove this ruler from his post and a new ruler will come who will punish all the associates of the previous ruler; or it may be that this ruler you want to be near to will turn against you and make you taste violence you will not be able to bear. Have you not heard of rulers turning against the people closest to them and executing them? We have heard and seen this often, especially during the revolutions which some nations have undergone. The picture is not hard to imagine. Read what Allah Almighty says:

"He makes you taste each other's violence." (6:65)

When you lift your hands to Heaven and ask for something and are insistent in asking Allah to give you what you ask for, you must remember that if your supplication is answered it is good and if it is not answered, that too is good, because by that Allah may be protecting you from great evil.

Insistence on the Blessing of Wealth

In their life people are always pressing for the blessing of wealth and some of them are surprised at how Allah Almighty gives unbelievers power and wealth in this world. Allah Almighty points out to us that this is not a sign of His pleasure and that sometimes he blesses an unbeliever to order to increase him in sin and disbelief because if He had denied him that blessing he might have woken up and repented. Allah extends to him the assets of this world because of the intensity of His anger towards him. Look at what Allah says about the unbelievers:

> *"Do not marvel at their wealth and their children. Allah merely desires to punish them by them during the life of this world, and for their souls to depart while they are still rejecters."* (9:55)

In this noble *ayat*, Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – addresses His Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and this includes all the Muslims, saying, "Beware of assuming that wealth and children are a gift and a sign of pleasure from Allah and imagining that they are good." When you look at all that this world gives you should not admire it overmuch because it may cause punishment for you. Wealth and children may cause a man to look at a blessing without remembering the Blesser. If man does not remember Allah Almighty, he disregards His Guidance. In the life of this world, wealth and children cause a man to be afraid of losing them. For someone who does not believe in the Next World, this world is all the time he has. If he neglects it that is a disaster for him. If it escapes him that it is a disaster for him. If he believes in Allah and the Last Day, he believes that if this world escapes him then he will find better than it with Allah.

The noble *ayat* shows us that wealth and children are admired for their own sake. Whoever has wealth is admired for what he has. Whoever has children is admired for what he has. If a man has both there is greater and more sweeping admiration for him. Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – wants to us to realise that the fact that a man has both wealth and children does not necessarily call for our admiration. When a unbeliever is helped with wealth and children that does not mean he is elevated by them. Indeed he is punished by them in this world and the Next World.

Any man who worships wealth lives in fear and anxiety despite his wealth. He lacks security because he fears poverty.

That is why he is stingy towards himself and his children and grasping about every penny he spends. He finds that although he possesses wealth he is afraid to enjoy it lest it decrease or vanish! He is in a constant state of humiliation. In order to preserve his wealth he is ready to kow-tow to people of influence even if that means committing acts of disobedience to Allah. He is afflicted with alarm by any event, fearing that his wealth will be lost. Outwardly he seems to people to be enjoying what he possesses, but in reality he lives in inward despair and fear. The first of the detriments arising from love of wealth is that it distracts a person from Allah and hardens his heart and leads to usurping the rights of the weak.

Similarly we find that the fact that Allah gives to the unbelievers does not mean that He has any love for them. It is to draw them on in order to inflict punishment on them. He distracts those unbelievers from His Guidance through their lack of faith and gives to them and increases them in wealth until they worship wealth and abandon the worship of Allah. Their wealth continues to distract them from His worship until their time comes and their souls depart while they are unbelievers. Then what will happen on the Day of Rising? Allah Almighty says:

> *"Those who reject and die as rejecters, the whole earth full of gold would not be accepted from any one of them, if he tried to ransom himself with it. A painful punishment awaits them. For them there are no helpers."* (3:91)

Were gold and wealth good for such people or were they the greatest of evils?

Chapter Five
Good and This World

Some people consider that this world was not created basically good. We see wealthy nations and poor nations. We see some people dying of hunger and others of over-eating. We see much injustice in the earth. We see one person who is blind and another who is paralysed and another person afflicted by debilitating illness. We see people tyrannising and harming others. How can it be just for a child to die of hunger or for an aged man or old woman to suffer in misery? Yet if we reflect a little, we will find that all these ills exist simply because the Laws of Allah Almighty are not applied. Because he is deluded and ignorant, it is man who has corrupted the earth and inflicted all these ills on it. Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – says in His Mighty Book:

> *"He placed on it firm-seated mountains towering over it and blessed it and established in it its nourishment, laid out for those who ask - all in four days."* (41:10)

Allah Almighty says, *"He established in it its nourishment."* There has always been nourishment on the earth adequate for all mankind since the time of Adam and there will be until the Last Hour. The proof of that is that when there is a famine in one country it imports or is sent the food it needs from other nations. Therefore all the nourishment that man needs exists on the earth. The trouble is that it is abundant in one nation and in short supply in another. The situation is simply a matter of poor distribution. There is no real shortage. Allah – glory be to Him

and may He be exalted! – has subjected the earth and what is on it to all His creatures. The Almighty says:

> *"He laid out the earth for all living creatures (an'âm)."*
> (55:10)

Here the word "*an'âm*" comprises all of Allah's creatures from the time of Adam until the Last Hour. But did Allah Almighty say which particular part of the earth He had laid out for which creature? He did not define this because all the earth belongs to all people. It is man who has come and established nations and defined borders and it is these nations and borders that are responsible for the problems in the world. Wars are fought because of them and invasions occur because of them.

It is evident that there are wealthy nations with a small populations and much wealth, and there are poor nations with large populations and little wealth. This has come about through a lack of balance in human affairs at the present time. If matters had been left as Allah had prescribed them everyone would have the food he needs without hardship and fatigue and then a balance would exist.

Those Who Cause Corruption in the Earth

This is regrettably only part of the story, for we find the wealthy nations also controlling the price of food and its production. America, for example, pays out subsidies to its farmers to encourage wheat cultivation in order to protect its worldwide price! A country like Brazil pours milk into the sea in order to prevent its price from decreasing. There are nations which take milk, eggs and many other foodstuffs and then spoil them and throw them into the sea in order to keep their world prices up! This is in spite of the fact that there are millions of mouths in the world which need that food, which need a loaf of bread or a cup of milk or eggs to eat. This spoiling of the blessings of Allah

Almighty is corruption of the earth – taking a blessing and then denying it to the creatures of Allah and depriving His slaves of it.

If these blessings had been men's doing it might have been possible to say that they had some kind of a right to do this; but all of them are part of Allah's creation. Men did not create the livestock which give the milk and meat; they did not create the chickens which give the eggs; they did not create the earth which produces the wheat and all the blessings; and they did not create the wheat grain which produces the wheat ears. But instead of giving the blessing of Allah to His slaves and exporting their surplus to help poor countries they throw it into the sea to deny the blessings of Allah to Allah's creatures!

We also find that there are nations which do not use the means Allah has given them in the earth. They have vast lands suitable for cultivation but instead of directing their energy into makinge these lands and fields fruitful they are occupied with wars and revolutions and changing governments and power struggles. Man occupies himself with struggling for this world instead of carrying out his task which is to make the earth flourish. That is the human injustice which deprives the slaves of Allah of the blessings of Allah. Allah Almighty says:

> *"Say: 'What do you think then about the things Allah has sent down to you as provision which you have designated as lawful and unlawful?' Say: 'Has Allah given you permission or are you forging lies against Allah?'"*
>
> (10:59)

Thus we see the injustice of the men who have divided the earth into states and created borders and denied access to the slaves of Allah although Allah Almighty created the entire earth for mankind – all mankind. It is the mind of man that has brought this misery into existence, that mind which Allah created for him so that he could choose between right and wrong, but he is busy with everything except his proper task in life which is to put the earth right. He is busy with destruction and with trying to dominate lands and people. He is busy with the struggle of

this world. As for his basic task of restoration, he neglects it and despises it. So the result is what we see and hear!

So human choice has led to misery instead of leading to good; to spoiling the blessings of Allah instead of making them increase; and to increasing the problems on the earth instead of solving them. Man's distance from Allah's Guidance is a disaster. People have acted according to their own ideas rather than acting by Allah's Guidance and therefore they corrupt and do not put things right.

Human arrogance makes man imagine that he can do what he likes with existence under the pretext of putting it right and improving it. So what does he do? He starts cutting down the trees and forests, which are the lungs by which the world breathes, and uses them to build factories which fill the atmosphere with pollution after it had been clean and pure. By doing this he causes holes in the ozone layer which threaten life on earth. He throws refuse and chemicals into the rivers and so pollutes the water which Allah had sent down clean and pure from heaven. The human mind also corrupts the fields. Man sprays on them huge amounts of poisons claiming that it is to fight pests. Then these poisons pollute the plants which men and animals eat and they afflict our bodies with weakness, illness and death. When scientists pointed out what these poisons do to crops, animals and human beings, people came back to their senses and became aware of their bad judgement. They only forbade their use after they had filled the world with the news that these pesticides would solve all the world's food problems and increase the yield of the earth and eliminate all pests.

They also used chemicals to treat illnesses and then began to ban them too when it turned out that their side-effects were worse than the illnesses themselves. All of this happened because man's knowledge is deficient and his intellect limited. He knows some things while other things remain hidden from him. He acts according to his deficient knowledge and his mind makes him imagine that he will achieve general good. Then he discovers his error and has to revoke what he began. He only sees the imme-

diate problem, whereas what will happen in the future is completely hidden from him.

Thus some nations began to agitate in the name of freedom and demand free sex. Indeed the British Parliament went further still and legalised sexual deviance. They began to boast that they had achieved the greatest amount of personal freedom for man. The truth is, however, that it is Allah's Guidance that realises the greatest amount of human freedom. The result was AIDS which spread like wildfire round the earth. AIDS is a fatal condition which has no cure and which has defeated scientists until now. Then the very same people who had spoken about personal freedom, free sex and sexual deviance, asked people to hold to virtue! Did they do it out of religious belief? Of course not. They did it out of necessity in order to save themselves from a fatal illness. If they had followed Allah's Guidance they would never have been afflicted by that pernicious illness in the first place.

All these phenomena are happening around us but we are not paying attention to them. Allah made usury unlawful and promised those who take usury the direst of punishments. But people have opposed Allah's Guidance and corrupted the economics of the entire world so that in some places the interest owed is more than the original loan and oppresses countries and entire peoples. The whole world has begun to seek to abolish it.

Things which the Human Intellect Does not Understand

After that we come to certain things which the intellect does not understand. Some people say, for instance: "If Allah Almighty made pork unlawful, why did He create it?" This is a stupid question issuing from the intellect of someone who does not believe. Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – created everything in existence and all things have their function which they fulfil whether we know it or not. Who says that pigs were created so that we could eat their flesh? It may be they

were created to purify the rubbish of thousands of germs which, had they been left, would have multiplied and spread and caused many epidemics for mankind. Allah Almighty made their meat unlawful. Therefore He created them for other reasons, but one thing we know is not to eat their flesh.

Another man may ask: "Why did Allah create snakes, scorpions, and beasts of prey which harm people?" We say to the enquirer: "You do not understand the meaning of these creatures. They exist to call your attention to the absolute power of Allah in His existence. Allah Almighty subjected to us many animals which serve us and give us much enjoyment in this world." Man does not understand that these animals were subjected to us by Divine decree. Allah Almighty also brought other animals into existence which are not subject to man.

You see a small child leading a huge camel which could kill him by striking him with its hoof. But the camel responds and is completely subservient to the child. He leads it where he likes and makes it walk wherever he wishes and kneel whenever he wants. Some people think that this comes about through the capabilities of the child but the truth is that it is by the decree of Allah Almighty. He is the One who has subjected and humbled the camel to man and made it obedient to him. But what about snakes and scorpions which are animals of very small size in comparison to the camel and with much less strength? When you want to make them obey you, you cannot do so. If these animals had been subjugated by your will you would have been able to subjugate the animals and insects which Allah Almighty has not made subject to your will. You should therefore have correct behaviour towards your Lord who has made submissive to you the animals from which you take flesh, milk, wool and skins, and did not make those animals rebellious. Whatever strength you are given, you are in reality powerless and Allah alone is the One with power.

After that we come to the illnesses which afflict man. Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – wants people to know, especially tyrants who are deluded by the strength and power Allah has given them in this world, that if He wanted, He could

give the smallest of His creatures power over them, things that cannot even be seen with the naked eye, to the extent of depriving them of the power to move and making them unable even to get out of bed. This is so that man may not become deluded by his power, strength and tyranny, and may recognise the extent of his stupidity in the face of the power of Allah Almighty. It gives him the chance of remembering that he will meet his Lord and therefore to work for the reckoning of that Day on which he will have neither power, strength nor helper, the Day which Allah Almighty describes when He says:

> *"The Day when the innermost selves are scrutinised and he has no strength nor any helper."* (86:9-10)

Some illnesses demonstrate Allah's justice in His creation. For instance, when someone is excessive in eating and takes more than his rightful share of food Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – may bring him a time in his life when he is afflicted with an illness which prevents him from eating and thereby calls his attention to the fact that for a number of years he has had more than his share. This is in order to correct the balance. Another example is provided by those who eat an excessive amount of sweets and sugar and then contract diabetes. They are then unable to take any type of sweet or sugar. The same often happens to people who only eat luxury white bread and refuse coarse bread. There comes a time when they can only eat the coarse bread which they refused to eat previously. That is why Allah Almighty says:

> *"And eat and drink but do not be profligate. He does not love the profligate."* (7:31)

Allah commands us to be balanced. Anyone who abandons balance in anything reaches the point where his conduct is put right by force. For instance, anyone who is profligate by staying up at night destroys his health until there comes a time when he cannot leave his bed. The justice of Allah Almighty demands that

those who are ill receive recompense for their illness as is expressed in the following *Hadith Qudsi*:

> "Allah, the Mighty and Exalted, will say on the Day of Rising, 'Son of Adam, I was ill and you did not visit Me.' The man will say, 'O Lord, how could I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds?' He will say, 'Do you not know that My slave so-and-so was ill and you did not visit him? Do you not know that if you had visited him, you would have found Me with him? O son of Adam, I asked you for food and you did not feed Me.' He will say, 'O Lord, how could I feed You when You are the Lord of the worlds?' He will say, 'Do you not know that My slave so-and-so asked you for food and you did not feed him? Do you not know that if you had fed him, you would have found that with Me. O son of Adam, I asked you for water and you did not give it to Me.' He will say, 'O Lord, how could I give You water when You are the Lord of the worlds?' He will say, 'My slave so-and-so asked you for water and you did not give it to him. Do you not know that if you had given him water, you would have found that with Me?'"

Everyone who is ill is near to Allah. Allah recompenses him for his illness by being near to him and alleviating for him the punishment of the Next World proportionately to the hardship he endures in the illness. This is a great repayment and an awesome privilege, that Allah is with you. Similarly Allah Almighty puts at the service of those who are ill others to nurse him, whether it is his family or other people, to replace for him the power and strength that the illness has taken away.

Disabilities ... Are they Evil?

This brings us to the disabled, those who are born blind or lame or with other disabilities. Are these things evil in them-

selves? People who say that they are have no understanding about Allah. If any constituent bodies of the universe, like the sun, the stars, the moon and so forth, had been imperfect in any way mankind would have been afflicted by terrible catastrophes. If they were to collide with one other or the sun were to explode, for instance, that would be a catastrophe which would destroy life on earth. That is why Allah created the universe with the utmost precision and order. It is not imperfect for a single second. Read His words:

> *"It is not for the sun to overtake the moon nor for the night to get ahead of the day: each one is swimming in a sphere."* (36:40)

Allah Almighty created this universe with a perfect order so that it can carry out its function to the full. The life of this world also constitutes part of the order of the universe. It is formed of individuals who make up tribes and nations and peoples. Fate has decreed that a very few of them should be afflicted by blindness or inability to speak or lack of the power to move – in accordance with a higher Divine wisdom whose essence we cannot perceive. There are two purposes in this.

The first is that you should see the blessings of Allah Almighty to you in people whom Allah has afflicted. When you see a blind man, you should say, "Praise belongs to Allah who saved me from that with which He afflicted some of His creatures!" You are aware of Allah's blessing to you and you thank Him for it. You repent of disobedience, full of gratitude to Allah for His blessings to you. It is same when you see a man who cannot move. You turn to Heaven and say in gratitude, "O Lord! You created me with the power to move!" But when you do not meet any of these people for some time you tend to forget the blessings of Allah because you are caught up in the throes of this world and your faith becomes weak. Disabled people remind you so that you may wake up.

The second purpose is for us to recognise that no member of our bodies acts by our own abilities but only because Allah has

subjected it to us to act as it does. We say, "I see with my eyes." So Allah Almighty brought into existence someone who has two eyes but cannot see so that you know that you only see by the power of Allah, who has given the eye the property of sight. The same applies to walking. Allah brings into existence people who have two feet but cannot walk, so that we will know that we only walk by the power of Allah.

The Beginning of Disbelief

Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – always desires to expel delusion from us because delusion is the beginning of disbelief. As long as a man is deluded and imagines himself to be independent of Allah, he will not turn in obedience to Allah and seek His pleasure. Why should he turn when he thinks that he himself has the power to do whatever he wishes?

But by His mercy, Allah Almighty desires to protect His slaves from delusion and from distance from Him. He reminds us that man only speaks by the permission of Allah, that the eyes only see by the permission of Allah, and that the feet only walk by the permission of Allah. The disabled and retarded, who are few, provide us with a proof of the absolute power of Allah in His creation and show us that He is able to create whatever He wills and that everything is from Him. If He wills, He brings it into existence. If He does not will, He removes it.

Some people then ask, "What sin have the disabled committed to deserve their affliction?" The truth is that Allah recompenses them with gifts which will make them equal to those who are sound. He gives them powers which are out of the ordinary. He compensates them for the loss which they have suffered and opens the hearts of His creation to them and makes them the focus of everyone's care and concern. That is why it is said, "Everyone with a disability is a tyrant," because Allah gives him power to repay him for his loss and make him preferred in things that sound people cannot do.

The Wisdom of the Decree in Denying and Giving

What then is the case with the insane? Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – distinguished man by the intellect. The madman lacks intellect, or in other words lacks the very thing which distinguishes the human being from other creatures. Allah Almighty desires by this to call our attention to the intellect. It is not an essential part of man. The intellect is what bequeathes us civilisations and produces progress in the world. Its faculties are subjected to you by Allah. They are not essentially yours. This is intended so that you may not be deluded by your intellect and intelligence into supposing that it can make you independent of Allah and so that you may not fall into the trap of thinking that you know better how to run the universe than Allah.

Allah created the intellect to choose between given alternatives but we do not keep it to its task in life. Instead we have used it to define a human way independent from the Divine Way and have tried to impose this way upon the earth in the belief that the best interests of this world lie in following it, whereas in fact it corrupts everything it touches.

It might be asked, "What sin has a madman committed to incur his affliction?" The truth is that Allah has given him a great privilege which is that he will not be called to account in either this world or the Next. In this world if a mad person insults you or throws at stone at you or does something else you do not call him to account. Indeed you laugh at his antics and do not blame him for them since the one who is doing them has no intellect. He might insult you and yet you laugh. He might grab hold of your clothes but you do not get angry. So he receives no reckoning in this world. And in the Next World he will enter the Garden without reckoning. All of mankind will be held to account except those who lack intellect. They will not be held to account for anything they did because the basis of the reckoning is free choice. A mad person lacks the faculty of being able to choose freely.

These are some reflections about the subject of good and evil and existence. The precision of the balance on which life is based is clear to us. It is a precise balance which accords justice in every instance. It does not deny anyone a privilege without giving him other privileges instead. Everything in existence has a function and a goal whether we perceive it or not. Every creature performs its function in life without waiting for our understanding or our agreement. The apparent injustice of which some people complain either comes from lack of understanding or is due to a conflict between their actual experience and the appetites which they desire to satisfy but which Allah denies by a wisdom which is hidden from them.

Happiness in life is achieved when man is content with the Decree of Allah. This contentment is what puts happiness in people's lives. And it is lack of contentment with the Decree of Allah which induces misery. There is a *Hadith Qudsi* in which Allah says on the tongue of His Messenger:

> "My slave, I desire and you desire. If you are pleased with what I desire, I will enrich you so that you can dispense with what you desire. If you are not pleased with what I desire I will wear you out in what you desire and then there will only be what I desire."

So whether you are content or not the Command of Allah Almighty will still be carried out, but contentment with the decree of Allah is what gives you good in this world, and anger at the Decree of Allah is what gives you misery and punishment in this world and the Next. This is the meaning of good and evil in relation to what happens in existence. The justice of Allah Almighty cannot prefer one man to another except by virtue of righteous actions. As for the things that happen which we deem unjust and unfair for us, that is due to our poor understanding and lack of awareness. Allah - glory be to Him and may He be exalted! - says:

> *"Allah certainly does not wrong people in any way, rather it is people who wrong themselves."* (10:44)

Chapter Six
Good and Evil in the Next World

Good is what is with Allah. Everything that does not bring you near to Allah or give you the reward of the Next World is not good, however much of it you have. Every action by which the Face of Allah is not desired is an action you forfeit. Your life in this world has a limited timespan for which you will be held to account. If you spend your life acting according to Allah's Guidance you will have obtained good. If you spend your life in disobedience and forget Allah, you will have lost and evil will be your lot. Allah Almighty says about that:

> *"Anyone who is removed far from the Fire and admitted into the Garden has won."* (3:185)

The goal for which we strive is salvation from the Fire and therefore, as we said, the life of this world is not an end in itself. It is rather an abode of trial which leads you to the end. This is the Way of good and evil in existence, as Allah Almighty has set it up and as the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, made clear when he said:

> "The feet of the slave on the Day of Rising will not slip until he is asked about four things: about his youth and how he endured its trials, about his life and how he spent it, about his property and where he earned it and on what he spent it, and about his knowledge and how he acted on it."

When we consult the Noble Qur'an, we find that it confines good to what is with Allah. Read the words of the Almighty:

> *"Whatever good you send ahead for yourselves, you will find it with Allah."* (2:110)

When we move to *Surat Ali 'Imran*, we find that Allah Almighty tells us how to turn to Him, how to thank Him, how to draw near to Him and how to acknowledge His bounty. That is when He says of Himself:

> *"All good is in Your Hands. You are Powerful over all things."* (3:26)

That means that all good is in the Hand of Almighty alone. That is because good does not exist in the hand of anyone except the Hand of Allah Almighty. Read what He says:

> *"And what is in the keeping of Allah is better for the people of true goodness."* (3:198)

The inevitable conclusion is to see that all good is in the Hand of Allah and that good actions are only those by which the Pleasure of Allah is desired. Every hour that passes in which you do not perform an action by which the Face of Allah is desired is wasted. It is an hour you have spent without achieving anything. No matter how many the hours of your life are, they are still limited and no moment which has passed will ever return.

Belief ... a Precondition for the Acceptance of Actions

Is good in this world good in itself or must it be connected to belief? In other words, if we do good without belief in Allah and all His Messengers and Books does it count in our favour in the sight of Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted?

There are many people who work for humanity – those who do research and invent things which benefit all mankind, or discover cures for incurable illnesses, or build refuges or hospitals for the mentally ill, or help a group of people suffering from poor conditions, or collect money and send food to those who are starving, or do any other of the actions which Allah Almighty has commanded His believing slaves to do and for which He promises them an immense reward in the Next World.

Such people do good not out of belief but out of common humanity and their sense of other people's need and in an attempt to alleviate the suffering of people and help them. What is the judgement concerning them? People such as these do not have a reward with Allah Almighty because the actions they did were not done intending the Face of Allah, which means these actions were not inspired by sincere belief. About this Allah Almighty says:

> *"But anyone who does right actions, being a believer, need fear no wrong nor any unjust injury."* (20:112)

Therefore faith is a precondition for the acceptance of righteous actions. Faith must exist first and secondly you must, by your action, be seeking the Face of Allah Almighty. So if anyone donates a large amount to a charitable organisation because the husband of the head of the organisation is in an important position and will be of use to him in his work, his action is not accepted by Allah. He is simply someone who pays money so that he will be called a great benefactor or a pious man. He desires reputation and does not desire the Face of Allah. Therefore he has no repayment awaiting from Allah Almighty. All who associate other goals and worldly aims with Allah do not do good despite the fact that the outward appearance of their action might seem to be good. They are doing it as a means to achieve other goals. Allah Almighty is the associate who can most freely dispense with associates.

But does Allah Almighty leave these actions without any repayment? Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! –

gives such people a reward in this world. When the Next World comes, they do not find any reward or record of a righteous action. The Noble Qur'an tells us about this:

> *"Anyone who desires this fleeting existence, We hasten for him in it whatever We will to whoever We want. Then We will assign him to Hell where he will roast, reviled and driven out."* (17:18)

So those who do good and do not believe in Allah or do not intend the Pleasure of Allah by it will be given full repayment for their action in this world. Their names are given to cities and statues of them are set up in squares and prizes are given to them and their lives are studied at various levels of education and they become eminent and famous. That is their repayment.

Allah Almighty wants us to face all the events of this world with strong faith. Otherwise we will be anxious about every event, whatever it is. That is why Allah gave us the criteria by which to assess events. By His mercy, Allah did not want to leave us in life to be blown about by every wind with our hearts full of anxiety and fear. Indeed, He gives us the yardstick of Reality by which we can act and by which we make our assessment.

The first thing which Allah Almighty wants is for us to free ourselves from being passive as regards the events of this world and to see them as trials and tests from Allah Almighty. We believe that these events were written down in His presence before He created the earth and those on it, and are decrees which descend at different times. What is asked of us is that we do not receive them with either excessive sorrow or joy. That is so that the soul of the believer becomes accustomed to not desiring things which will incur Allah's anger and is not joyful except at things whose reward is with Allah. This is the true yardstick by which we must assess what happens. Allah Almighty says:

> *"Nothing happens, either in the earth or in yourselves, but that it is in a Book before We bring it into being. That is an easy matter for Allah. So that you will not be grieved*

about the things that pass you by nor exult about the things that come to you. Allah does not love any vain or boastful one." (57:22-23)

None of the events of this world should alarm us, whatever they are, because this world is the world of change. One day you may be rich and the next day poor. One day you may be strong and the next day weak. One day you may be in power and the next day abased. These changes are part of the nature of the life of this world. That is why it is necessary to accept them with correct understanding. None of the events of this world are constant. If it is dark today, tomorrow the light may come. If today is difficult, tomorrow may bring ease. This is the nature of events. Everything is in change. The one definite thing is the Next World. That is the thing you must strive for.

Whenever one of the righteous is approached by a beggar asking for money or food he welcomes him even though he will take some of what he has. He greets him with jubilation and says, "Welcome to the one who will carry for me my good deeds to the Next World!" because he knows that this beggar has come for his benefit and to make what he has last forever. If he had eaten that food or spent that money he would have lost it, but when he gives it away, he makes it last forever and will receive a reward for it from Allah in the Next World.

Allah Almighty informs us that we should not interpret events in this world in the way which they appear to us. We should leave the meaning and not attempt to philosophise about them. The Almighty says:

"It may be that you hate something and it is good for you." (2:216)

And He also says:

"It may be that you dislike a thing when Allah has placed much good in it." (3:19)

Allah desires to arm us with belief against the events that hem us in. When something which we dislike happens to us, we should remember these *ayats* and say, "Perhaps Allah has put good into this thing which we dislike but we do not know it." This alleviates some of the pain of the human soul when something we dislike happens to us, and at the same time it makes us always optimistic. Furthermore Allah Almighty wants to make us understand that He there can be evil in things we treat as good. Allah Almighty gives us examples of this in the Noble Qur'an:

> *"And from the fruit of the date-palm and the grape-vine you take both an intoxicant and excellent provision. In that there is certainly a sign for people who use their understand - ing."* (16:68)

Allah Almighty wants to make it clear to us that it is our use of a thing that makes it good or evil, not the thing itself. For instance, grapes and dates have been created by Allah Almighty in order to be good provision. In them He has given us good food with great nutritional value and so forth. There is no intrinsic evil in them and no harm for man. But people have taken this good provision and changed it into provision which is not good by turning it into wine which clouds the mind and prevents it from carrying out its function correctly and have thereby caused one of the greatest wrong actions and causes of evils in this world. Did Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – create dates and grapes to this end? Did He create them to enable man to drink wine and disobey Him? Of course not. So who was the one who corrupted their function in life and changed them from being good provision to being unlawful provision? It was man who took these blessings and corrupted their purpose and corrupted their function and made them the means to wrong action and aggression, instead of making them help man to remember Allah and thank Him.

Evil and the Caprices of Mankind

Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – created the sun for us to illuminate existence and to radiate its warmth in it and to give plants, animals and man the things they need to help them to carry out their function in existence. By the light of the sun the crops photosynthesise to produce oxygen for us so as to make our life on earth possible. By the light of the sun the animals are able to fulfil their functions of ploughing, carrying goods and so forth. Man strives and works in its light to increase the cultivation of the earth and makes use of its warmth for the needs of his life.

Some people, however, started to worship the sun and by so doing changed it from being good provision into being a cause of disbelief and worship of other than Allah! The sun did not command that. On no day did it say, "Worship me." It did not send messengers to command people to worship it nor did it send guidance to make clear to people how to worship it. It did not do any of that. Rather it is itself under compulsion, moving in its orbit with the utmost precision. It is man who has brought about corruption.

The same applies to stones. They have many uses but people make idols out of them which they worship! The things which are there in existence do not corrupt. In themselves they are sound and have a function which they fulfil in the most perfect possible way. Corruption comes from man. Idol-worship comes from man. And unbelief comes from man.

These are the kind of concepts we should apply as the basis for deciphering the life of this world. We should not use a corrupt yardstick emanating from ourselves. But who is the source of this corruption? Without a doubt the corrupter of existence is someone who desires a personal limited benefit, someone who desires power over this world. The goal of someone who uses a knife to kill is often to obtain money to which he has no right. The goal of someone who preaches sun-worship is to be a high priest so that people will bring him wealth without him having to do any work.

Those who call people to anything false do so first of all out of desire for the worldly gain they will achieve through it, a gain which will raise them to the level of people of wealth and influence without them doing anything to merit it. But those who call people to Allah expend their own wealth and effort on doing it and gain nothing of this world by it. They spend joyfully and are the first to take on the difficulties of responsibility and worship. Their one hope is for their righteous actions to be accepted by Allah.

In His Book Allah - glory be to Him and may He be exalted! - calls our attention to the fact that our criteria are defective:

> *"Those who are tight-fisted with the unbounded favour Allah has given them should not reckon it better for them. On the contrary! It is worse for them."* (3:180)

This attests to the importance of expending. The job of Shaytan is to make people afraid to spend in the way of Allah out of fear of poverty. However, the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Wealth is not decreased by *sadaqa*." So giving out never diminishes wealth: it increases it and puts blessing into it. Blessing is that something gives you more than you expect from it. Allah always gives the gift of blessing to the believers, so they find that although their provision might be little it still covers all their needs and expenses. Food which is in theory only enough for two will prove more than sufficient for five. A little provision satisfies them and they do not covet more nor does it occur to them to desire more than they have. Instead, they feel that their lives are happy. Their minds are at rest and their souls at peace. They are content and constantly attached to Allah.

By contrast, those who cling to their property and do not spend it or give it away imagine that they are doing good for themselves when in reality they are doing evil. They do not draw near to Allah with their wealth nor will they in fact hold on to their wealth, because it will leave them when their lives come to an end.

The Summit of Evil in this World is Disbelief

The summit of evil in this world is disbelief. There is no greater evil to be found than that because there is no sin greater than disbelief. An unbeliever has committed something which causes Allah to exclude him from His mercy. That is why Allah Almighty says:

> *"Allah does not forgive anything being made a partner with Him but He forgives anything apart from that to anyone He wills."* (4:48)

Thus even if someone who enters into disbelief were to be given the entire world, it would be evil for him, because however much he has, the enjoyment of this world is very little. However much wealth, rank, or power he has it will leave him. That is why Allah Almighty says:

> *"The worst of beasts in the sight of Allah are those who reject and do not believe."* (8:55)

Why are they the worst of beasts? We know that beasts have no intellect. They cannot think or understand. Nonetheless, they carry out their appointed tasks in full. They carry loads and perform all that is asked of them or for which they were created. They are ruled by instinct. When food is brought they eat what they need and then stop eating. If you try to tempt them with more food they refuse it, no matter what it is, because the rule of instinct is a true one which only lets the animal have what it needs. On the other hand, you find man, who has been given choice, stuffing his belly with food. Someone tells him, "You did not try this sweet," or "You have never tasted this variety," and he does not respect the fact that Allah has forbidden us excess with regard to food. He fills his stomach until he is unable to move. The human species directs itself to sensual gratification and not simply to self-preservation.

Allah Almighty has honoured man with intellect so that he

can reflect on His signs in existence and come to believe that this universe has a Creator who brings things into existence. But instead of that, he uses his intellect as a means to disbelief and heresy and so it distances him from Allah and makes him disobedient to Allah. So it is as if he repudiates this great honour which Allah has given him. Indeed, he directs it to the opposite of its appointed task and in doing so he is lower than a beast which crawls on the earth on all fours.

To conclude, we can sum up by saying that the true meaning of good and evil in this world and the Next World is based on the point of view of the *deen*. Good is righteous action by which the Face of Allah is intended and by it you hope for the gift of the Next World. All that comes from Allah is good and all that is intended for the Face of Allah is good. Evil in existence comes from the choices made by man. He is the one who corrupts existence, corrupts life in it and corrupts its laws, supposing all the while that he is putting things to rights while in reality corrupting them.

Allah - glory be to Him and may He be exalted! - has brought beneficial things and many blessings into existence for us but we have corrupted them by transforming them into means of making humanity wretched. Man suffers from his own choices. Existence contains enough for all of Allah's creation from Adam until the Hour comes but it is selfishness which has corrupted everything. It has made some people hold on to the good things of Allah instead of giving them to those who need them.

This world is a means to the Next World. It takes you either to the Garden or to the Fire – we seek refuge with Allah! When things are misdirected from their true function and cause man to destroy his abilities and his soul and make him disobedient to his Lord and bring on him His anger, the end result is misery. Then he has nothing at all.

Good lies in what Allah chooses. Man does not possess the necessary knowledge to make himself the judge of events. That is because he does not know the future outcome of what happens today. Our dislike of something does not mean that we should

take that as a measure of its being evil. We might dislike a thing when Allah has put much good in it and we might like a thing when Allah has put much evil in it. If we desire happiness in this world and the Next, we must be pleased with the Decree of Allah because the Decree of Allah – glory be to Him and may He be exalted! – is always good. Whoever is pleased with it, is guided to a Straight Path.